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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 VILNIUS 000609

SIPDIS

STATE PASS TO EUR/NB, EUR/RPM (SWANDERSON) AND PM/PPA
(SKWAK)

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TAGS: [MOPS](#) [MCAP](#) [MARR](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [LH](#) [AF](#)

SUBJECT: LITHUANIA DEPLOYS PRT TO AFGHANISTAN; WILL NEED
CONTINUED SUPPORT

REF: A. VILNIUS 595

[1](#)B. VILNIUS 527

[1](#)C. USDAO VILNIUS IIR 6 938 0041 05

Classified By: Political/Economic Officer Alexander Titolo for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (U) SUMMARY: Intensive U.S. airlift operations in support of the Lithuanian-led Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) headed to Chaghcharan, Afghanistan, began from Zokniai airfield June 6. This mission is the most ambitious military undertaking in modern Lithuania's existence, and it enjoys broad official support. Speaking while visiting Spain, President Valdas Adamkus said the PRT "will be our contribution to world peace." U.S. assistance was critical in making this deployment a reality. Continuation of these flows -- including through a significant allocation of Coalition Solidarity Funds to the GOL -- will be a key element in ensuring its success. END SUMMARY.

GOODBYE VILNIUS, HELLO CHAGHCHARAN

[1](#)2. (U) Minister of Defense Gediminas Kirkilas and Chief of Defense Major General Valdas Tutkus staged an emotional, pro-American send-off June 3, which the Ambassador attended. Kirkilas paid tribute to Lithuania's partnership with the United States, which he said symbolized the trust Lithuania has earned in NATO after only one year of membership, and commended the special friendship between our country and Lithuania. Both he and Tutkus expressed gratitude for U.S. support, which they said was decisive to Lithuania's acceptance of the mission. Kirkilas said that Lithuania could take pride in building a secure and democratic Afghanistan -- a task that is an integral part of Lithuania's strategic interest in expanding the zone of freedom and democracy in the world.

[1](#)3. (SBU) The PRT began deploying on June 6 in sorties on U.S. C-17 aircraft from Zokniai air base in northern Lithuania. The seven flights that have departed as of June 10 comprise approximately half of the total number expected to be necessary. The 109-troop contingent and its equipment will complete its move to Afghanistan by June 18 at the latest.

SHORTFALLS WILL NOT ENDANGER INITIAL OPERATIONS

[1](#)4. (C) The Commander of the PRT, LTC Gintautas Zenkevicius, told DAO (ref C) that he was very satisfied with the U.S. support he is receiving. He hoped that contributions from other allies will increase once the PRT is established. (To date, only Denmark and Iceland have pledged personnel for the PRT.) President Adamkus expressed the same sentiments in public comments during his state visit to Spain earlier this week. There are significant personnel shortfalls in the PRT, most notably in medical-surgical capability and the number of Mobile Liaison Observation Teams. Zenkevicius said that he does not expect these deficits to constrain the initial phase of the operation.

[1](#)5. (SBU) Lithuanian planners are also keenly aware of funding constraints on their mission. MFA Undersecretary Dalius Cekuolis expressed the GOL's gratitude to the Ambassador on June 9 for the support the USG has provided to the PRT. At the same time, noting the significant resources that the GOL had already used to set up the PRT, he stressed the budgetary constraints the GOL faces in supporting the mission (ref A).

PARLIAMENT SIGNS ON

[1](#)6. (U) A potential domestic roadblock to the PRT that the GOL needed to overcome was for Parliament to raise the ceiling on the number of troops that can be deployed for international missions. As post reported on May 19 (ref B), Foreign

Minister Antanas Valionis told the Ambassador that he expected speedy passage through Parliament of the necessary legislation. Tutkus expressed equal confidence to the Ambassador on June 8, on the eve of the vote. Tutkus noted that the National Security and Defense Committee had unanimously approved the draft proposal. The full Parliament approved the resolution June 9 with 76 votes in favor, two opposed, and ten abstentions.

COMMENT

17. (C) Cekuolis' fear that the budget-draining Afghanistan deployment will compromise other defense priorities, such as transformation, is widely shared within the GOL. The fiscal cost and underwhelming contributions to the PRT from other allies did not deter the GOL from following through on its commitment. However, these factors underscore for GOL leaders the importance of U.S. support, both logistical and financial, to the Chaghcharan mission's success. Continued USG assistance will likely be a key factor in determining the extent and duration of GOL commitments in Afghanistan and elsewhere. From our perspective, allocation of a significant portion of Coalition Solidarity Funds to Lithuania would be the best way to demonstrate U.S. support for a prolonged and effective Lithuanian presence in Ghawr.
Kelly